



FOCUS

106 N. Bronough Street (32301-7723) • P.O. Box 10209 (32303-2209) • Tallahassee, FL • (850) 222-5052 • Fax: (850) 222-7476

Hurricane Victims Deserve Tax Relief Property Tax Bill Should Reflect Loss of Value from Damage

Florida property owners whose homes or businesses are severely damaged from recent hurricanes should receive an abatement on their yearly property tax bill to reflect the loss of value. That's the conclusion of a new Research *Briefings* by Florida TaxWatch, which also calls for the Florida Legislature to take appropriate action in a special session.

Florida law has no mechanism for adjusting property taxes due on property damaged by natural or manmade disasters. Consequently, even owners of homes and businesses that were completely destroyed by the hurricane are liable for taxes based on the buildings' value as of last January 1.

"This is a matter of fairness, pure and simple," wrote Dominic M. Calabro, President of Florida TaxWatch, in a letter to Governor Jeb Bush. "It's only fair not to tax someone for the period of time their home or business is uninhabitable due to damage by a hurricane."

Florida TaxWatch recommends that the Legislature convene in a special session to accomplish property tax abatement for taxpayers whose homes have been rendered uninhabitable. A coalition of property appraisers in the affected counties are calling on the Governor and the Legislature to grant them the authority to adjust property values in the wake of the storms.

According to the Red Cross, Hurricane Charlie alone destroyed 12,000 homes and left more than 19,000 others uninhabitable without major repairs. Another 50,000 homes received "minor" damage. Frances will add thousands more to that toll. And now Hurricane Ivan is threatening to deliver another blow to Florida property owners.

The Legislature has acted in the past in similar situations. In 1998, the Legislature passed a law that provided relief for homeowners in seven counties in South and Central Florida that were damaged by a series of tornadoes. To qualify, the building had to be incapable of being used and occupied. Property appraisers then calculated a partial tax abatement based on the number of months the building was uninhabitable.

Florida TaxWatch urges the Legislature to move quickly to provide some tax relief to property owners and allow local governments time to assess and plan for the impact.

Inside this FOCUS

- Hurricane Relief Fund Growing
- DPA Winners Lend Their Brains to Relief Efforts
- Agriculture Loses Big
- Florida Consumer Confidence Rising
- Florida Jobs Growing in Number & Quality